

EPI Update for Friday, February 6, 2009

Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE)

Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Items for this week's EPI Update include:

- **Quick rise in influenza activity**
- **Study highlights increased prevalence of RSV infection in U.S. children; Iowa cases of RSV appear to be increasing**
- **More than two of every three Iowa homes have elevated radon levels**
- **Meeting announcements and training opportunities**

Quick rise in influenza activity

Influenza activity is on the rise and this week Iowa's activity level has been changed from sporadic to regional. Significant activity has been reported in three regions in Iowa, particularly in higher population areas of Central and Eastern Iowa.

This season influenza AH1 has been the most predominant strain with AH3 coming in second. Influenza B has been the least common, but is being reported more as we move into peak influenza season.

Rapid flu test reliability should be acceptable in Northeast Iowa due to the prevalence of influenza in this area of the state. Initial rapid positive results in other regions of the state should be confirmed by the University Hygienic Laboratory. In addition, if a rapid test is negative for a patient strongly symptomatic with influenza the test should be confirmed by UHL.

It is important to follow the guidelines for the use of antiviral medications. Data from CDC shows H1 influenza A circulating in the U.S. is susceptible to amantadine antiviral medication. Influenza AH3 and B infections are impacted by both amantadines and neuraminidase inhibitors (oseltamivir and zanamivir). For more information about antiviral guidelines go to www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/index.htm. Please continue to support influenza vaccination.

Study highlights increased prevalence of RSV infection in U.S. children; Iowa cases of RSV appear to be increasing

A recent study published by the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) estimates that respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) affects 2.1 million children under the age of 5 every year in the U.S. In study participants under the age of 5, RSV was responsible for 20 percent of hospitalizations, 18 percent of emergency visits, and 15 percent of office visits. Traditionally the focus for RSV diagnosis has been infants, but this study emphasized the importance of considering RSV in children several years older.

RSV usually begins four to six days after exposure, with runny nose and decreased appetite. In most cases coughing, sneezing, and fever will develop one to three days later. Some patients with RSV require respiratory support and hospitalization. Recovery typically takes one to two weeks. There is no vaccine for RSV, although an immune globulin is available for high-risk infants.

The Iowa Department of Public Health and University Hygienic Laboratory passively survey Iowa children for RSV infection. Health care providers are encouraged to test suspected cases when appropriate. The percent of total RSV tests reported positive this past week increased to 39 percent. Previous weeks ranged between 20 and 30 percent.

- For more information on the research study referenced in this article, go to the NEJM website at content.nejm.org/cgi/content/short/360/6/588.
- For more information on RSV visit www.cdc.gov/rsv/.
- Weekly RSV percent positivity is published in the Iowa Influenza Surveillance Network report found at www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/iisn.asp.

More than two of every three Iowa homes have elevated radon levels

Radon is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that can cause lung cancer. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates up to 70 percent of Iowa homes have elevated radon levels. While radon gas causes no immediate health symptoms, long-term exposure can cause lung cancer. The EPA estimates 399 Iowans die each year because of radon-related lung cancer.

IDPH recommends testing all homes and apartments in Iowa. If radon levels are found to be too high, there are simple and affordable venting techniques that can lower the gas to an acceptable level. Radon gas seeps into a house the same way air or other soil gases enter: from the soil around and under the home; through cracks in the foundation, floor or walls; through hollow-block walls; and through openings around floor drains, pipes and sump pumps. Radon has been detected in new and old homes, and in homes with or without basements. Test kits are simple to use and can be obtained by calling the Iowa AIR Coalition of Public Health Officials at 800-206-7818. Licensed measurement and mitigation specialists are listed at www.idph.state.ia.us/eh/radon.asp.

Meeting announcements and training opportunities

The University Hygienic Laboratory (UHL) is offering a Wet Workshop at the Ankeny facility. This one day workshop will be offered twice, on Tuesday, March 10 and Wednesday, March 11, 2009. This program is geared for clinical microbiologists and will provide in-depth information and hands-on experience about specific select agents of bioterrorism. Protocols for collecting and handling specimens will be addressed. For more information, contact Rick Bonar at (319) 335-4099 or richard-bonar@uiowa.edu.

Online registration is now available for the Iowa Public Health Conference, April 7-8, 2009 at the Scheman Building on the Iowa State University campus in Ames. Early registration is due March 10, 2009; regular online registration is due March 28. Consult the web site for details. <http://www.iowapha.org/Default.aspx?pagelid=127969>

2009 Great Plains Regional Laboratory Expo

Hosted by the state societies of the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, the expo offers continuing education and networking opportunities for laboratory professionals. The meeting will be held in Council Bluffs, Iowa on April 29, 30, and May 1, 2009 at the Mid-America Center. For more information, go to www.nscls.net/2009springmeeting.html.

Save the Date: The Annual Iowa Infection Prevention and Control Seminar will be held May 5-6 at the Marriott Hotel in Coralville, Iowa. The conference will feature a variety of speakers on state and national infection control issues. More details will be posted when they become available.

Have a healthy and happy week!

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